

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Oscar Lee Sykes, # 138335,

Plaintiff;

vs.

E. Lloyd Willcox, II, Attorney, in his professional and
individual capacity,

Defendant.

) C/A No. 4:06-0621-RBH-TER

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) Report and Recommendation

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Background of this Case

The plaintiff is an inmate at the Lieber Correctional Institution of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC). The defendant is a private attorney in Florence, South Carolina. The defendant has represented a local government and jail officials from the J. Reuben Long Detention Center in a civil action filed by the plaintiff in Oscar Lee Sykes v. Horry County, et al., Civil Action No. 4:04-2329-RBH-TER, which is still pending in this court. On February 24, 2006, the undersigned issued a Report and Recommendation that the defendants' motion for summary judgment in Civil Action No. 4:04-2329-RBH-TER be granted and that the plaintiff's motion for

a preliminary injunction be denied. Objections to the Report and Recommendation in Civil Action No. 4:04-2329-RBH-TER are due on March 13, 2006.

In the above-captioned case, the plaintiff alleges that the defendant in Civil Action No. 4:04-2329-RBH-TER acted as unauthorized counsel, violated the plaintiff's Fourteenth Amendment rights, failed to comply with the plaintiff's discovery requests, breached the confidentiality of the case, and subjected the plaintiff to reprisal. The plaintiff seeks ten million dollars (\$10,000,000) in damages from the defendant.

Discussion

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915; 28 U.S.C. § 1915A; and the Prison Litigation Reform Act. The review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 118 L.Ed.2d 340, 112 S.Ct. 1728, 1992 U.S. LEXIS® 2689 (1992); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-325, 1989 U.S. LEXIS® 2231 (1989); Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519

(1972); Nasim v. Warden, Maryland House of Correction, 64 F.3d 951, 1995 U.S.App. LEXIS® 26108 (4th Cir. 1995)(*en banc*), *cert. denied*, 516 U.S. 1177, 134 L.Ed.2d 219, 116 S.Ct. 1273, 1996 U.S. LEXIS® 1844 (1996); Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983); and Boyce v. Alizaduh, 595 F.2d 948 (4th Cir. 1979)(recognizing the district court's authority to conduct an initial screening of a *pro se* filing).¹ *Pro se* complaints and petitions are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir.), *cert. denied*, Leeke v. Gordon, 439 U.S. 970 (1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint or petition filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. See Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 9-10 & n. 7 (1980)(*per curiam*); and Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint or petition, the plaintiff's or petitioner's allegations are assumed to be true. Fine v. City of New York, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2nd Cir. 1975). Even under this less stringent standard, the § 1983 complaint is subject to summary dismissal. The

¹Boyce has been held by some authorities to have been abrogated in part, on other grounds, by Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319 (1989)(insofar as Neitzke establishes that a complaint that fails to state a claim, under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), does not by definition merit *sua sponte* dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) [formerly 28 U.S.C. § 1915(d)], as "frivolous").

requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. Weller v. Department of Social Services, 901 F.2d 387, 1990 U.S.App. LEXIS® 6120 (4th Cir. 1990).

Generally, a case can be originally filed in a federal district court if there is diversity of citizenship under 28 U.S.C. § 1332 or there if there is so-called "federal question" jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1331. Federal courts are courts of limited jurisdiction, "constrained to exercise only the authority conferred by Article III of the Constitution and affirmatively granted by federal statute." In re Bulldog Trucking, Inc., 147 F.3d 347, 352, 1998 U.S.App. LEXIS® 13210 (4th Cir. 1998). Since federal courts have limited subject matter jurisdiction, there is no presumption that the court has jurisdiction. Pinkley, Inc. v. City of Frederick, 191 F.3d 394, 399, 1999 U.S.App. LEXIS® 20859 (4th Cir. 1999), *cert. denied*, Pinkley, Inc. v. Servacek, 528 U.S. 1155, 2000 U.S. LEXIS® 1043 (2000)(*citing* Lehigh Mining & Mfg. Co. v. Kelly, 160 U.S. 337, 327 (1895)). Accordingly, a federal court is required, *sua sponte*, to determine if a valid basis for its jurisdiction exists, "and to dismiss the action if no such ground appears." Bulldog Trucking, supra, 147 F.3d at 352. See also F. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3) ("Whenever

it appears . . . that the court lacks jurisdiction of the subject matter, the court shall dismiss the action.”).

“[T]he facts providing the court jurisdiction must be affirmatively alleged in the complaint.” Davis v. Pak, 856 F.2d 648, 650, 1988 U.S.App. LEXIS® 12311 (4th Cir. 1988)(*citing* McNutt v. General Motors Acceptance Corp., 298 U.S. 178 (1936)). To this end, Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(1) requires that the complaint provide “a short plain statement of the grounds upon which the court's jurisdiction depends[.]” If, however, the complaint does not contain “an affirmative pleading of a jurisdictional basis, the federal court may find that it has jurisdiction if the facts supporting jurisdiction have been clearly pleaded.” Pinkley, Inc., *supra*, 191 F.3d at 399 (*citing* 2 Moore's Federal Practice § 8.03[3] (3rd edition 1997)).

Although the absence of subject matter jurisdiction may be raised at any time during the case, determining jurisdiction at the outset of the litigation is the most efficient procedure. Lovern v. Edwards, 190 F.3d 648, 654, 1999 U.S.App. LEXIS® 20860 (4th Cir. 1999). If the court, viewing the allegations in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, finds insufficient allegations in the pleadings, the court will lack subject matter jurisdiction. Id.

The defendant is subject to summary dismissal because he has not acted under color of state law. In order to state a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege that: (1) the defendant(s) deprived him or her of a federal right, and (2) did so under color of state law. See Gomez v. Toledo, 446 U.S. 635, 640 (1980); and American Mfr. Mut. Ins. Co. v. Sullivan, 526 U.S. 40, 50-52, 1999 U.S. LEXIS® 1711 (1999). See also Hall v. Quillen, 631 F.2d 1154, 1155-1156 & nn. 2-3 (4th Cir. 1980), *cert. denied*, 454 U.S. 1141 (1982).

The district court in Hall v. Quillen, supra, had disposed of the case against a physician and a court-appointed attorney on grounds of immunity. In affirming the district court's order, the Court of Appeals, however, indicated that lower courts should first determine whether state action occurred:

* * * But immunity as a defense only becomes a relevant issue in a case such as this if the court has already determined affirmatively that the action of the defendant represented state action. This is so because state action is an essential preliminary condition to § 1983 jurisdiction, and a failure to find state action disposes of such an action adversely to the plaintiff. * * *

Hall v. Quillen, 631 F.2d at 1155 (citations omitted). See also Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co., 457 U.S. 922, 936 (1982)("Careful adherence to the 'state action' requirement . . . also avoids imposing on the State, its agencies or officials, responsibility for conduct for which they cannot fairly be blamed.").

Although a private individual or corporation can act under color of state law, his, her, or its actions must occur where the private individual or corporation is a willful participant in joint action with the State or with an agent of the State. Dennis v. Sparks, 449 U.S. 24, 27-28 (1980). Purely private conduct, no matter how wrongful, injurious, fraudulent, or discriminatory, is not actionable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 or under the Fourteenth Amendment. See Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co., supra, 457 U.S. at 936; and Burton v. Wilmington Parking Authority, 365 U.S. 715, 721 (1961).

Whether a private individual's action or corporation's action rises to the level of state action necessarily depends on the relationship between the activity and the state. The inquiry involves "whether there is a sufficiently close nexus between the State and the challenged action . . . so that the action of the latter may be fairly treated as that of the State itself." Jackson v. Metropolitan Edison Co., 419 U.S. 345, 351 (1974). In Blum v. Yaretsky, 457 U.S. 991, 1004 (1982), the Supreme Court held that a state is responsible for private action only when it has exercised "coercive power" or has provided "significant encouragement" in the implementation of the action. It is also well settled that "a private person does not act under color of state law simply because he invokes state authority." Brummett v. Camble, 946

F.2d 1178, 1184 (5th Cir. 1991), *cert. denied*, Campbell v. Brummett, 504 U.S. 965 (1992).² See also Auster Oil & Gas Co., Inc. v. Stream, 764 F.2d 381, 388 (5th Cir. 1985); American Mfr. Mut. Ins. Co. v. Sullivan, *supra*, 526 U.S. at 50-52 (held: private insurer did not act under color of state law, for purposes of 42 U.S.C. § 1983, when it terminated payment of workers compensation benefits pending review); and *cf.* Kreschollek v. Southern Stevedoring Co., 223 F.3d 202, 2000 U.S.App. LEXIS® 18189 (3rd Cir. 2000)(applying holding in Sullivan to suit alleging action under color of federal law: termination of LHWCA [Longshoremen and Harbor Workers' Compensation Act] benefits by insurance company did not involve "federal government" action). Hence, the defendant's actions in representing defendants in a civil case in federal court does not constitute action under color of state law. As a result, this federal district court has no federal question jurisdiction over the above-captioned case. 28 U.S.C. § 1331.

²In this citation, there are variant spellings of the party known as Camble or Campbell.

Negligence, legal malpractice,³ and the tort of outrage are causes of action under South Carolina law. See, e.g., Epstein v. Brown, 363 S.C. 372, 610 S.E.2d 816, 2005 S.C. LEXIS® 90 (2005); Brown v. Theos, 345 S.C. 305, 550 S.E.2d 304, 2001 S.C. LEXIS® 134 (2001), *affirming* 338 S.C. 305, 526 S.E.2d 232, 1999 S.C.App. LEXIS® 187 (S.C.Ct.App. 1999); Mitchell v. Holler, 311 S.C. 406, 429 S.E.2d 793, 1993 S.C. LEXIS® 71 (1993); and Yarborough v. Rogers, 306 S.C. 260, 411 S.E.2d 424, 1991 S.C. LEXIS® 218 (1991). A civil action for negligence, legal malpractice, or outrage would be cognizable in this court under the diversity statute, if that statute's requirements are satisfied. Cianbro Corporation v. Jeffcoat and Martin, 804 F. Supp. 784, 788-791, 1992 U.S.Dist. LEXIS® 21007 (D.S.C. 1992), *affirmed*, Cianbro Corporation v. Jeffcoat and Martin, 1993 U.S.App. LEXIS® 30,080 (4th Cir., November 22, 1993), 10 F.3d 806 [Table].

³The recently-enacted "Tort Reform Act of 2005 Relating to Medical Malpractice" (2005 S.C.Acts No. 32) also applies to suits against persons with professional licenses. John Moylan, After the Dust Clears: Changes in S.C. Tort Law, 17 South Carolina Lawyer No. 2, 36, at 37 (September 2005)("Tort Reform Act of 2005 Relating to Medical Malpractice" also changes procedures for suits against certified public accountants, architects, lawyers, land surveyors, marriage and family therapists, professional engineers, and veterinarians).

The diversity statute, 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a), requires complete diversity of parties and an amount in controversy in excess of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000.00):

(a) The district courts shall have original jurisdiction of all civil actions where the matter in controversy exceeds the sum or value of \$75,000, exclusive of interest and costs, and is between—

(1) citizens of different States[.]

28 U.S.C. § 1332. Complete diversity of parties in a case means that no party on one side may be a citizen of the same State as any party on the other side. See Owen Equipment & Erection Co. v. Kroger, 437 U.S. 365, 372-374 (1978). The plaintiff and the defendant are citizens of South Carolina. As result, complete diversity of parties is absent. See 28 U.S.C. 1332; and Strawbridge v. Curtiss, 7 U.S. (3 Cranch) 267 (1806). Hence, this federal court lacks subject matter jurisdiction over the above-captioned case. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3), which provides: “Whenever it appears by suggestion of the parties or otherwise that the court lacks jurisdiction of the subject matter, the court shall dismiss the action.”

Recommendation

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the above-captioned case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of process. See Denton v. Hernandez, *supra*; Neitzke v. Williams, *supra*; Haines v. Kerner, *supra*; Brown v. Briscoe, 998 F.2d 201, 202-204 & n. *, 1993 U.S.App. LEXIS® 17715 (4th Cir. 1993), *replacing* unpublished opinion originally tabled at 993 F.2d 1535 (4th Cir. 1993); Boyce v. Alizaduh, *supra*; Todd v. Baskerville, *supra*, 712 F.2d at 74; 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)[essentially a redesignation of "old" 1915(d)]; and "new" 28 U.S.C. § 1915A[as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal]. The plaintiff's attention is directed to the Notice on the next page.

Respectfully submitted,

May 5, 2006
Florence, South Carolina

s/Thomas E. Rogers, III
Thomas E. Rogers, III
United States Magistrate Judge

Notice of Right to File Objections to Magistrate Judge's "Report and Recommendation"

&

The Serious Consequences of a Failure to Do So

The plaintiff is hereby notified that any objections to the attached Report and Recommendation (or Order and Recommendation) must be filed within **ten (10) days** of the date of service. 28 U.S.C. § 636 and Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6. A magistrate judge makes only a recommendation, and the authority to make a final determination in this case rests with the United States District Judge. See Mathews v. Weber, 423 U.S. 261, 270-271 (1976); and Estrada v. Witkowski, 816 F. Supp. 408, 410, 1993 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 3411 (D.S.C. 1993).

During the ten-day period for filing objections, **but not thereafter**, a party must file with the Clerk of Court specific, written objections to the Report and Recommendation, if he or she wishes the United States District Judge to consider any objections. **Any written objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections.** See Keeler v. Pea, 782 F. Supp. 42, 43-44, 1992 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 8250 (D.S.C. 1992); and Oliverson v. West Valley City, 875 F. Supp. 1465, 1467, 1995 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 776 (D.Utah 1995). Failure to file specific, written objections shall constitute a waiver of a party's right to further judicial review, including appellate review, if the recommendation is accepted by the United States District Judge. See United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91, 94 & n. 4 (4th Cir.), *cert. denied*, Schronce v. United States, 467 U.S. 1208 (1984); and Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841, 845-847 & nn. 1-3 (4th Cir. 1985). Moreover, if a party files specific objections to a portion of a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation, but does not file specific objections to other portions of the Report and Recommendation, that party waives appellate review of the portions of the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation to which he or she did not object. In other words, a party's failure to object to one issue in a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation precludes that party from subsequently raising that issue on appeal, even if objections are filed on other issues. Howard v. Secretary of HHS, 932 F.2d 505, 508-509, 1991 U.S.App. LEXIS® 8487 (6th Cir. 1991). See also Praylow v. Martin, 761 F.2d 179, 180 n. 1 (4th Cir.) (party precluded from raising on appeal factual issue to which it did not object in the district court), *cert. denied*, 474 U.S. 1009 (1985). In Howard, *supra*, the Court stated that general, non-specific objections are *not* sufficient:

A general objection to the entirety of the [magistrate judge's] report has the same effects as would a failure to object. The district court's attention is not focused on any specific issues for review, thereby making the initial reference to the [magistrate judge] useless. *** This duplication of time and effort wastes judicial resources rather than saving them, and runs contrary to the purposes of the Magistrates Act. We would hardly countenance an appellant's brief simply objecting to the district court's determination without explaining the source of the error.

Accord Lockert v. Faulkner, 843 F.2d 1015, 1017-1019 (7th Cir. 1988), where the Court held that the appellant, who proceeded *pro se* in the district court, was barred from raising issues on appeal that he did not specifically raise in his objections to the district court:

Just as a complaint stating only 'I complain' states no claim, an objection stating only "I object" preserves no issue for review. *** A district judge should not have to guess what arguments an objecting party depends on when reviewing a [magistrate judge's] report.

See also Branch v. Martin, 886 F.2d 1043, 1046, 1989 U.S.App. LEXIS® 15,084 (8th Cir. 1989) ("no de novo review if objections are untimely or general"), which involved a *pro se* litigant; and Goney v. Clark, 749 F.2d 5, 6 n. 1 (3rd Cir. 1984) (*per curiam*) ("plaintiff's objections lacked the specificity necessary to trigger *de novo* review"). **This notice, hereby, apprises the plaintiff of the consequences of a failure to file specific, written objections.** See Wright v. Collins, *supra*; and Small v. Secretary of HHS, 892 F.2d 15, 16, 1989 U.S.App. LEXIS® 19,302 (2nd Cir. 1989). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections addressed as follows:

**Larry W. Propes, Clerk
United States District Court
Post Office Box 2317
Florence, South Carolina 29503**